and push us yet further along the road to privatisation. Can we turn back? We should reflect on the consequences of expedient measures taken, with the best of intentions, to help our patients through difficult times.

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The clinical promise of molecular pathology

And the birth of a new BMJ journal

The explosive growth of knowledge at the molecular level over the past few years has provided us with insights into the causes and consequences of disease processes and enabled the development of new techniques and "molecular probes" that are useful to diagnostic pathologists. Examples include the application of specific antibodies, especially those of monoclonal derivation, which have revolutionised routine pathological practice. Now DNA probes offer the potential to add yet another dimension to pathologists' armoury.

Discoveries relating to Hodgkin's disease are a case in point. For many years its pattern and incidence have perplexed researchers, as geographical and familial clusters have often been observed. Furthermore, many studies have noted a positive relation with infectious mononucleosis. Infectious mononucleosis is caused by the Epstein-Barr virus, and researchers have suspected that at least some cases of Hodgkin's disease might result from infection with this virus. The advent of molecular methods has made it possible to show the genome of the Epstein-Barr virus in the lymph nodes of many patients with Hodgkin's disease, but this alone does not confirm a causal association between the virus and the lymphoma. Molecular pathology has enabled us to localise, by *in situ* hybridisation, the Epstein-Barr virus genome in Reed-Sternberg and Hodgkin's cells in tissue sections from patients with Hodgkin's disease: a causal relation can no longer reasonably be questioned.

The example of Hodgkin's disease illustrates a link between virology and histopathology, and molecular studies of disease continue to emphasise the associations among the disciplines of pathology. For instance, it is now possible to use molecular methods to screen for chromosomal defects in both fetal tissues and specimens from malignant tumours by use of the fluorescence *in situ* hybridisation method. Both of these applications have important clinical implications for the management of patients.

One of the many uses of the polymerase chain reaction is to detect expression of the oncogene *bcl-2*, characteristic of follicular lymphoma, and help clinicians to monitor the response to treatment of patients with this disease. Localisation of *bcl-2* protein product in tissue sections is now a useful means of making the otherwise very difficult distinction between follicle centre cell lymphomas and benign follicular changes in lymphoid tissues. Recently there have been great advances in our understanding at the molecular level of certain biochemical disorders such as diabetes mellitus, cystic fibrosis, and α_1 antitrypsin defi-

ciency, and this improved insight will almost certainly help us to diagnose and manage these disorders.

Many of these advances have resulted from the pursuit of basic research. One problem for clinicians, however, is that this research is disseminated in a wide range of scientific publications, including those dedicated to pure science and others representing specialised medical disciplines. Many new techniques will not become apparent to diagnostic pathologists until their applications are reported in journals to which the pathologists have regular access. Few fully multidisciplinary journals report the results of studies of the molecular basis of disease, and a considerable time may elapse before routine or research pathologists become aware of potential diagnostic molecular procedures. Furthermore, there are advantages in publishing data in a multidisciplinary biomedical journal rather than one devoted to a specialised topic.

For these reasons the BMJ Publishing Group is to launch a new publication, *Clinical Molecular Pathology*, which will appear as an edition of the *Journal of Clinical Pathology*. The new publication will encompass the results of studies carried out on human material at the molecular level relevant to the causes and consequences of disease. The definition of "molecular" will be deliberately wide, including biochemistry and cell biology as well as molecular genetics. The editorial board reflects the multidisciplinary and international flavour of the journal, and this will be the first European venture of its sort. The issues of *Clinical Molecular Pathology* will be regularly intercalated with those of the *Journal of Clinical Pathology*, and its content will therefore supplement and complement that of the *Journal of Clinical Pathology*. The new edition will also include review articles written by experts. Together the two publications should satisfy the demands of those with an interest in pathology at all levels. An additional advantage of this arrangement will be the immediate inclusion of the edition's contents in the indexing services, such as Medline and *Current Contents*.

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